

## [Me, I Vote for the Best Man]

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Mari Tomasi Men Against Granite

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Me, I Vote For The Best Man

Mario Sacrosanto's car was one of the dozen parked in the stoneshed yard. Good cars. Not new, not expensive makes. But good cars. Mario slapped the stone dust from faded [denim?] overalls. He pulled the powdery, visored cap from his matted hair and whacked it heartily against the running board before squeezing his chunky body behind the wheel. As he drove past a cemetery entrance at the edge of town he pointed to a pile of dismantled cars rusting in a field of weeds. "Hah, look! Look at that junk pile. Right across from the cemetery it is! Every day I see it, an' every day it does something here to my stomach. It is an insult to the dead. The city should do something, no?" Another half mile and Mario's brown cottage came into view. It sat on a knoll against a background of spruce.

He was proud of his home. "See, it is fine to live like this in the open." Mario brought the car to a stop and smiled. "Back on [Bortan?] Street the houses got stuck so close together that always we hear all kind of family noise—the radio when we do not want to hear it, laughing, crying. I make the foundation for this house myself in my spare time ten year' ago. My ol' home in Italy is like this. Not the way it is built, but the way it is jus' far enough from town so you can be alone when 2 you feel to be alone."

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A path with an occasional flat granite chip for a stepping stone led to the kitchen. A middle-aged woman in a cotton house dress was leaning over the sink straining white curds of warmed sour milk.

Mario opened the screen door. "My wife," he said. And in a louder voice, "Mama, you got to leave that cheese for a few minute'. We got company to talk to."

She smiled a welcome, wiped her hands on a towel and sat down facing her visitor at the kitchen table.

Mario hitched his chair closer to her and began in a half-apologetic, hesitant way, "Mama, I decide today to get seat covers for the car. I see some pretty stripe' ones in a window an' I go in an' get them." He kept his warm brown eyes half-veiled. He would not meet her gaze. "Brown an' white stripe', Mama. I think you will like it."

[Lena?] Sacrosanto shrugged her shoulders helplessly as she said, "Listen to him. Always he is crazy, that one, to buy this an' that for the ol' car. Ten year ol', it is. He got to buy something for it every two, three day'. Once it is a cigar lighter he put in, an' never does he smoke in the car. Never. Then after, he say: now I have the cigar lighter so I got to get a good ash tray, foolish to have one an' not the other... He treat the car like it is his own child. Now it is the stripe' covers. I say to him all the time: instead you buy something every week, why don't you trade the car? Get a 3 new one. Bah, if the girls were here at home an' not married, he would get a new car for sure. Always the girls wanted the best."

"But it is still good," Mario protested mildly. "I like it. Sure, it is ol'...."

"You get used to it an' you hate to part from it," [Lena?] said. "I tell you the same that I say 'bout the wash' machine — when it is ol', trade it in. Get a new one."

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Mario hunched back in his chair and thumbed the straps of his overalls. A twinkle lurked in the autumn-brown of his eyes. "Ah, I have had you for a long time. Would you want that I trade you, too, Mama?" he teased.

"Now you talk crazy!" [Lena?] flung at him. She turned her face away to hide the red that flooded her cheeks like a schoolgirl's. The next minute she said[.?] "He is one to make funny talk all the time. So long an he is start', then I will tell you what happen' once. If I do not, he will. I know him. Me an' Mario, we are both born in Novaro[.?] In north Italy. Well, we are think' to get married, an' Mario he wants to come to America to live. I remember the day jus' like it is today. It is winter. My father is just come in from fix the ol' kitchen house on the mountain. It is a place where the men cook their meals in the summer time when they are up there with the goats. They are all sit' at the table. My father, mother, four brothers, an' two sisters. In 4 the middle of the table in a big bowl of macaroni. Mario is stand' there to tell my father that we will be married right away an' come to America. My father is mad. He know Mario since he is a baby, he talk to him an' scold jus' like he is his own boy. My father, he keep on eat', he push' macaroni in his mouth, an' all the time he scold': how much you got over the fare for you an' [Lena?]? Only a few lire, eh? What you think you will do to eat? For clothes? You think you will fin' gold in the air? Go to America alone, Mario. Fin' work. Then write to [Lena?]. She will go then, eh [Lena?]?"

[Lena?] Sacrosanto gave her husband a brief glance. "Before I have a chance to speak, this one he say to my father, 'Look, why do you have to sit an' eat the macaroni now when I talk of marriage? [Let?] us talk. Eat afterwards.' My father is very mad. 'I eat when I want,' he tell Mario. He eat some more, then he say, ' Dio , any fool will know that macaroni is not good col'."

"Then Mario, he get smart. He say to my father, he say, 'I guess it is better me an' [Lena?] we [got?] married now. You know the ol' proverb, Matrimony an' macaroni, if they are not hot, are not good. Yes, I guess we get married now.'

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Mario's face had worn a complacent smile as [Lena?] told the story. Now he laughed aloud. [Lena?] Joined him. "Mario, he win over my father easy that time. We got married right away an' we come to America. My father is 5 mad for a while, but he get over it. Mario has win over a captain in the army, too," [Lena?] boasted. There was no doubting the pride in her voice as she spoke of her husband's skill in winning over. "Tell," she urged him, "tell 'bout the time you win over the captain."

"Ha, that was nothing—" Mario began. "But if you want to hear, I will tell you: Above where we used to live in Novaro are the Alps. It is funny, there is the mountain, on one side are rich people, on the other side are poor people like me an' Mama. One side is a sport place like Moritz where the rich ones spend money to catch col' an' break their legs. Me, I never go there once. I am satisfy' with my side. Well, it come the time when I have to serve my three year' in the army. Over there all the young men do service. I was with the Alpini. All the time we march an' climb up the mountain', sometime on bare rock, sometime in snow up to the neck. Once I win a sharpshoot' medal there for shoot' the eagle that is so high up it look like a dove. One day twelve of us are sent to scout on a mountain top, I am made the leader that day. It is a col' winter day. The wind is blowing, an' the snow is [slap'?] the eyes so we cannot see two feet in front of us. We are lost for a day an' a half, an' without food. When we fin' our way back to camp we are hungry it make something turn here now in my stomach to think of it. Well, we go straight to the kitchen. The cook'—five of them—will 6 give us nothing. Not even bread. Half-dead we are with huger an' col', an' those dam-pig cook' will not feed us. Why? Jus' because the captain an' his men are not yet return' for their own supper! I say to the cook': All right, you got your order not to feed except at meal time, but today it is different, we have been lost, we are hungry. Feed us. I am the leader, I will take the blame..... But no, it is still no. Well, we are hungry, so I give the sign to my eleven men. We grab those cook' fast, an' we lock them up in the supply room. Then we eat. Hah, how we eat!" Mario jerked his grey head up and down to emphasize his words.

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"Well, we twelve are put in the army jail for that. Not really jail, but all the time we have to stay in camp an' work hard while the rest go to town an' have fun. One day we make camp jus' five mile' from my home. I have not seen my people for many mont', so I think an' think, an' bye-n-bye I get the courage to ask the captain for a few hour' leave. I ask him. By God, that captain is mad!" Mario laughed heartily as he drew a word picture of the captain. "Mad! His moustache stand out straight an' he yell[.?] 'The nerve you got, Sacrosanto! You should be in jail, an' you dare ask me for leave! You lock up the cook', an' you got the nerve to ask me a favor!'

"Signor Capitano,' I tell him, 'you mus' remember we are all hungry that day, half-dead...' But he will not 7 listen. All he say is, 'The nerve you got! I should jail you even longer.'

"Well," Mario continued, "pretty soon I am mad, too. I say, 'Signor Capitano, I suppose you will jail me longer now anyway. I half expect' it before I ask' you. But I think of the ol' proverb— The one that risk' nothing, will win nothing, so I try."

Mario continued his story. "For a minute I think the captain will strike me. Then he start to laugh a deep laugh down here from the stomach, an' he say. 'Damn you, Sacrosanto. All right, take your leave tonight! Go home, an' make sure your mother will feed you so much that you will not have to tie up the cook' again.'

"It is funny," said Mario. "I never again see that captain alive. When I get back from my leave he is sick with the heart trouble, an' he die the next day. I am glad I serve' in the army. Anyway, I can say I have eat jackass meat. We have to eat it once when we are stuck in the Alps." Mario Sacrosanto chuckled. "It [tastes?] good, too. Jus' like steak.

"Mussolini has made a change in the service. Now it is shorter than three year'. That man Mussolini. Well, I cannot say I like him, I cannot say I do not like him. True, he is a great man. The iron man. He is strong enough to put Italy on top of the world. In one way he is

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like Roosevelt, only stronger. Me, I never say I am Republican, or I am Democrat. I vote for the 8 best man.

“Once Mama was the same—the man I want for president, she want him, too. But since spring she is turn' dam strong Democrat. I will tell you what happen': We are out to ride one afternoon on the road to the quarry. It is raining hart, an' my ol' car she have a flat tire. Mama is foolish enough to get out an' help me, so we both got wet. There is a big car come up beside us. A New York car. I know they must be rich people because a chauffer is in front. One of the ladies in back - there are three of them - she tell the chauffer to stop. Then she call out to me, 'What's the matter?' An' when I tell her, she say[.?] 'My chauffer will help you.' Then she ask Mama to get in the car with them an' visit until the tire is change'. Well, from that day Mama is turn' strong Democrat. Mama say these women they talk a lot 'bout politics. This rich woman, she give plenty of praise to the Democrats. When we get home Mama say[,?] 'If a woman so good, so smart, an' so rich is a Democrat, then it mus' be the best party. It will be my party.'”

[Lena?] Sacrosanto said, “She was a fine woman.”

“You think,” Mario teased, “If she did not have a chauffer, she would get her own skin wet to help you?”

“Crazy, you!” [Lena?] dismissed his question with a flutter of her hands. She went to the next room and returned with a photograph.

“You want to see the picture of our three girl'?” 9 she asked me. “The picture is a few year' ol'. Now they are all married. Two in Massachusetts, one here in Barre. The oldes' one married a granite salesman from Quincy, now they live there. The second girl went down there to work after she take a year at business college. In a year she is married, too. A fine man from her office. The younges' one marries a Barre boy, Italian—they come up here a lot to see us.”

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Mario interrupted to continue his discourse. "In the ol' country, when a girl is grow up she think right off to get married. Over here they all want to work. I have only five year' of school, then I get to work quick. I fin' a job here in Barre the week I get here. In the shed. I been stonecutter ever since. Hard work, yes. But I would not be happy to do soft, easy work. When I get through in the shed I have plenty to do here at home. We got one cow an' thirty chickens. Mama is busy all the time, too. You see the cheese she is make' when we come in? That is milk from our cow. She make the cottage cheese, then she salt an' pepper it an' add a little hot pepperoni chopped up fine, then she pack it down hard an' keep a few week'. The three girl', they used to like it but they never learn' how to make it. So once in a while Mama will send them a cheese."

Mario Sacrosanto tilted his chair back and gazed out the window at the green knoll sloping against the darker green of spruce. "Yes, it is good to be in the 10 open. It is jus' like my ol' home. Eh, Mama, what you think?"

[Lena?] Ascrosanto smiled without speaking.